



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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FIRST TEST OF GULF OF MEXICO FISH AFTER KATRINA FINDS NO ELEVATED HYDROCARBON CONTAMINANTS

Fish samples collected from coastal and offshore marine waters of the Gulf of Mexico two weeks after hurricane Katrina show no elevated exposure to contaminants related to oil, announced the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. These results are just one part of contaminant testing of Gulf water and fish currently underway at NOAA. Additional results on potential exposure to bacteria, pesticides and other toxic chemicals will be available within days, and additional testing on shrimp samples from Mississippi Sound is ongoing.

NOAA will continue to collect and test samples over the next two months to monitor for changes due to releases of contaminants and as water is once again pumped out of the streets of New Orleans after floods caused by Hurricane Rita.

“As people in the Gulf region begin to rebuild their lives and return to work, NOAA will continue to monitor the effects of the hurricanes on seafood and coastal water safety,” said retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher Jr., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. “Results from the first limited round of tests show that the water quality and fish in the Gulf of Mexico do not now indicate an elevated presence of hydrocarbons due to oil. We expect to have results from pesticide and chemical tests in the coming days.”

NOAA’s environmental impact research is part of a government-wide effort to keep the American people safe and to help stabilize the region’s economy in the aftermath of the Gulf hurricanes. The area is known for its valuable seafood production and coastal way of life.

Agency scientists conducted the research cruise aboard the NOAA research vessel *Nancy Foster* September 13-16. The vessel sailed from Pensacola, Fla., along the coastlines of Alabama and Mississippi, and then around the southern tip of Louisiana at the mouth of the Mississippi River and back. During the cruise, oceanographers, toxicologists and microbiologists collected water, fish, and sediment samples to determine whether hurricane Katrina resulted in elevated levels of contaminants in the ocean.

“We will continue to monitor the environment and fish and shellfish to assure the public that the seafood supply is healthy,” said Bill Hogarth, director of NOAA Fisheries Service.

The samples were flown to one of NOAA’s premier toxicology labs in Seattle as soon as the ship returned to port in Pensacola on Friday, Sept. 16. Last week, the samples were prepared and tested for a variety of chemical contaminants, such as polycyclic aromatic

compounds, which are typically absorbed by marine life in areas impacted by oil spills. The samples also were tested for a number of harmful bacteria, and the results of those tests will be made available as soon as the analyses are complete.

NOAA also has contracted with the owner of the *Patricia Jean*, a commercial shrimp vessel, to collect samples from shallower waters of the Mississippi Sound and into Lake Pontchartrain. NOAA scientists aboard the *Patricia Jean* will continue to collect water, fish and sediment samples. Both the *Patricia Jean* and the *Nancy Foster* are in the Gulf of Mexico conducting follow-up surveys this week.

NOAA also is conducting a comprehensive analysis of fishing infrastructure damage caused by the hurricanes. The agency has teams surveying the region's fishing fleets, seafood processing plants, fish markets and bait shops. The survey will take months to complete, although NOAA will release preliminary information as it becomes available.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitats through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners and nearly 60 countries to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes.

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On the Web:

Hurricane Katrina Environmental Impacts: www.st.nmfs.gov/hurricane_katrina

NOAA Fisheries Service: www.nmfs.noaa.gov

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